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MOTORCYCLE COLLISIONS ON THE RISE IN CALIFORNIA

SACRAMENTO – May is Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month, an important event that aims to increase awareness of motorcyclists at a time of the year when large numbers of riders are taking to California's streets.

The California Highway Patrol's (CHP) primary mission is to prevent loss of life and injury to all motorists. That mission parallels the Strategic Highway Safety plan, a roadmap for improving safety on the state's roadways that all state traffic safety organizations follow. One element of the plan is to improve motorcycle safety.

"Our goal is to encourage the motoring public to be vigilant in observing motorcyclists on the road and to encourage all riders, new and returning, to get trained," said California Highway Patrol (CHP) Commissioner Joe Farrow.

The same qualities that make California so attractive for residents and tourists alike -- warm weather, plenty of sun and beautiful scenery -- also make it an especially popular state for motorcyclists.

"Home to more than 1.2 million licensed riders, every year in California thousands of motorcyclists are involved in collisions resulting in the loss of hundreds of lives," said DMV Director George Valverde.

Preliminary numbers from 2008 indicate more than 500 motorcyclists were killed in collisions statewide. In fact, rider fatalities are consistently on the rise with each passing year.

"The unfortunate thing is most of these collisions could be easily avoided simply by increasing awareness," said Caltrans Director Will Kempton. "With a little extra vigilance, I believe we can dramatically reduce the number of lives lost in motorcycle crashes."

Creating a safer highway environment is the shared responsibility of drivers and motorcyclists alike. This is achieved by staying alert and using common sense and courtesy while on the road.

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“Year after year, the No. 1 identifiable primary collision factor for motorcycle-involved collisions is unsafe speed,” said Commissioner Farrow, who’s also a former police motor officer. “It’s important for motorcyclists to minimize their risks by riding responsibly, always wearing a helmet and other protective gear and never riding after consuming alcohol.”

The CHP strongly encourages all riders to sign up for the California Motorcyclist Safety Program (CMSP) before beginning to ride. CMSP offers the Basic *RiderCourse* for beginners and Advanced *RiderCourses* for riders who are interested in sharpening their skills.

“Last year was another record year for CMSP with 70,469 students enrolled in the Basic *RiderCourse*,” said Robert Gladden, Director of Program Administration for the Motorcycle Safety Foundation. “That total represents an 11 percent increase over the previous year and brings the program total to over 600,000 students trained since inception.”

To enroll in a CMSP course at any of the 124 training sites throughout California call 1 (877) RIDE-411. The CMSP Basic Course will be no more than \$250 for riders who are 21 years old and older and for those under age 21, who are required by law to take the course, it is \$150. Additional information may be obtained at the CMSP website www.ca-msp.org.

In conjunction with Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month, the CHP is rolling out two new public service announcements (PSA) for CMSP that will run on television stations throughout the state. The first spot is an Easy Rider-type PSA designed for the returning riders, while the second, Skills spot, targets the new rider. Funding for the 30-second PSAs was provided by a \$1.5 million dollar grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

“With motorcycle deaths becoming such an all-too-often-seen tragedy recently, we need everyone – riders and car drivers alike – to take notice and actively work on the problem,” said OTS Director Christopher J. Murphy. “Through education and enforcement, we hope to see a decrease in the number of motorcycle-involved collisions in California.”

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